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Trans-Generational Dialogue on Self and Motherhood in BernardineEvaristo's*Girl, Woman, Other*

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Letter of Recommendation

Puja Oli has completed her thesis entitled “Trans-generational Dialogue on Self and Motherhood in BernardineEvaristo’s novel *Girl, Woman, Other*under my supervision. She carried out this research from December 2022 to March 2023. I hereby recommended this thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

..……..

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Trans-Generational Dialogue on Self and Motherhood in BernardineEvaristo’s*Girl, Woman, Other*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Puja Olihas been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Puja Oli

Trans-generational Dialogue on self and Motherhood in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl,Woman, Other*

Abstract

This research explores trans-generational dialogue on self and motherhood in Bernadine Evaristo's novel Girl, Woman, Other,*explains the familiar voices of mothers that resound from within the structure of self. The concept of trans-generational trauma and its transmission is examined, as well as the potential of phantoms to transform through generations into the reality of Evaristo's characters.By bringing the theoretical concept of NicoletaGheorge on trans-generational trauma, this research explores self-identity and motherhood in the novel. The trans-generational dialogue, which occurs because of the DNA Test, gets the female characters traumatized in the novel,which helps them to have subjectivity as the black women in the white dominated British society.Thus, the research concludes that transgression of traumais a caustic factorinstigating identity crisis among the women of the color.*

Keywords: *trans-generational, transgress, phantom, DNA Test, self-identity, trauma*

Introduction

This research paper attempts to study the issue of trans-generational dialogue and self -identity of motherhood in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl,Woman, Other* by taking theoretical insights from trans-generational trauma. The main aims of this proposed research paper are to encourages the reader to re-historicize the (m)others and thus emphatically incorporate their stories' relevance for today's cultural and social realities.If one is willing to share the spotlight and at the same time regard the shadows' edges, depths and overlaps it will become apparent how much the untold stories of our (m)others define where we stand in society.

The study identifies several key themes, including the challenges of navigating mother-daughter relationship, and the ways in which societal norms shape our understanding of motherhood. It paints a vivid portrait of the state of contemporary Britain and looks back to the legacy of Britain's colonial history in Africa and the Caribbean. It is a magnificent portrayal of the intersections of identity and a moving and hopeful story of an interconnected group of Black British Women.In Evaristo's novel the form is fusion between verse and prose that is marked by questions and exclamations marks but only a small amount of full stop is used.

In this novel there aremany secrets and silences between mother and daughter relationship, and these implications affected in trans-generational transmission of the trauma. If there is a trauma that haunts a family, it is there also a trauma that haunts a whole society. Evaristo uses the vast complexity of Black British womanhood as an example of human diversity. The theoretical deliberations on the notions of self and the other, with the expansion towards a discussion on trans-generational trauma and the significance of the (m) other, will establish an understanding of phantoms acts of self-representation in Evaristo's novel.

This paper explores the familiar voices ofmothers that resonate from within the structure of our self. If we listen, they tell their triumphs; voices we cannot quite locate might lead the inquisitive mind into rooms that feel like someone must have just passed through or see the remains of a broken window reminiscent of a violent intrusion, the locked door of which we were always told not to open. The potential for a more truthful sense of self can only derive from the recognition of familial history and the act of rooting oneself in this co-narrated story called life. Every mother's story is our story.

As we dive into Evaristo's novel, we can add a new truth to our self-narrative. The life of my mother, and her mother and so on, they all matter for me but also for the society as a whole, despite silence their voices. They all matter because they made me who I am and as Giles and Middleton claim, all of our "cultural forms and practice are also shaped by the subjectivities of individual women and men in our roles as social actors" (31). So, as we let the narrative of our (m)others resonate through our selves we seize the opportunity to re-anchor ourselves in familial and societal history. It is important to establish an understanding of this correlation for the later analysis of *Girl, Woman, Other* as the characters products of their own socio-cultural time and place as well as part of a familial history that impacts the individual on a level, they are not aware of, and consequently society at large.

In order to gain a further understanding of the other within, the analysis now turns towards the acts of self-representation and how these acts are influenced by the other. As discussed, the tendency to construct the self as the sole protagonist of one's narration does not suffice when inquiring thewhole history (70). This tendency to assume a singular 'truth' about the self is magnified in the construction of the other. "Much of our discourses of the inside and outside, of the self and the other, of the

individual and society, of the subject and the object, are grounded in that particular logic of identity" (65). It is in the nature of individuals to assume subjectivity for constructing the self by establishing an objectified, or reductionist view of the ones they recognize as others. According to Jennifer C. Nash, in the British society, in which we enquire through Evaristo's novel, the search for the 'true' self, an assumedly personal matter, becomes quite political as the co-protagonists' "legal invisibility" (48), clashes with the multiplicity the West appropriated. While this multiplicity bears the potential for change in the momentum of a groups' story, as the widespread use of cultural codes seemingly unified the black British experience by offering belonging, recognition and a certain degree of historical relevance, being black is still the defining factor for being the 'other' in a Western society. Yet, it is undeniable that there is political and social power attached to the category black.

For Evaristo's, identifying with and belonging to a group dissolves the instability she feels in her concept of self and imbeds a sense of power into individual acts of self-representation as they gain meaning and social relevance. "In Brit(ish), Afua Hirsch perceives the ability to identify with a group as desirable, "because when it comes to the black British experience, Sam's world is its epitome" (6).The fact that the male body is placed in the center of theblack British experience (7) hints to a hegemony within the 'other' that promotes the note of a unified collective identity, which could be spoken about almost as if they were singular actors in their own right but which, indeed, placed, positioned, stabilized and allowed us to understand and read, almost as a code, the imperatives of the individual self: the great collective social identities of class, race, nation, gender and the West (66). Assuming a single truth about the other ends the dialogue between self and other, whether within or outside the self, for the other's 'truth' negates ambivalence, silencing each voice that

cannot join the chorus.

By being excluded in the construction of the other, simultaneously by the West and the group ‘black’, Evaristo’s novel shows how hegemony is reproduced and black women’s narrative is disregarded. In according to Jeniffer C. Nash’s statement of western societies has missed opportunity to remedy black women’s legal invisibility” (48), the analysis supports the statement and claims that black women are systematically and legally disqualified from being the other. That renders their relevance to the social and historical past as well as their constituting role to this moment to the bare minimum, even with the perspective of multiplicity. It further argues that the disregard of (m)others has formed the narrative of self and other in national and familial history alike, which means that all history is connected to the narrative of black (m)others.

The destructive potential innate to living such a contested identity, especially high for second or third generation immigrants whose connectedness to their diaspora origin is not as strong as it were in former generations. For individuals whose socio-cultural environment does not offer many points of reference this demand leads to a higher awareness of one’s status as the other.In this sense, As ZanibRasool notices, “in the UK, there is an increased focus on social cohesion and integration” (73). She continues that young people from minority ethnic communities experience a great deal of pressure in order to fit in with the national narrative of ‘Britishness’ and often feel that they should conform outwardly in their dress and physical appearance, and adopt British sociocultural practices (73).

The tension between conforming to a British national identity and the inability to completely do so because of belonging the social category ‘black’ and ‘female’ results in “young people from minority ethnic communities spending a lifetime on

self-exploration and negotiating their contested identities" (73). The destructive potential innate to living such a contested identity is especially high for second or third generation immigrants whose connectedness to their diaspora origin is not as strong as it were in former generations. For individuals whose socio-cultural environment does not offer many points of reference thisdemand leads to a higher awareness of one's status as the other.

This paper argues that this idyllic vision of a home without need to justify one's existence is not possible, for lots of internal and external debate to exist as a 'true self' is held within the family, and in concern to the novel discussed, within the mother and daughter relationship.Maya Angelou argues that, "The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go on as we are and not be questioned" (9). Being home then means having a place where there is no need to justify ones' existence. Hirsch also confirms the importance of belonging, as she muses, "But when it came to my identity, I felt impoverished. I longed to be around other black people, to have a sense of black culture and community, to see a flicker of recognition in a person's face when I told them my name" (8).

I argue that the resilience of the characters in the face of social, racial and gender marginalization springs from their ability to understand the thoughts, feeling and solidarity. This emphasis on the importance of care for the other highlights the need for improving not only women's rights and socioeconomic opportunities but of benefiting humanity on a broader scale.MerveSarikaya-Senin her article, discusses Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* as a trans- modern narrative that gives voice to a marginalized group of black women living in Britain and She argues that, the face of social, racial and gender marginality springs from their empathetic relatedness and solidarity (The European Legacy). It was written in a hybrid style that combines prose

and poetry and eschewing punctuation and long sentences, the novel interweaves sundry stories from the late nineteenth to the twenty-first century set in countries ranging from Africa, the Caribbean, and America to Britain. This networked structure exposes trans-temporal and transnational patterns of diversity, connectedness and relationally, as well as the distinctive genealogy of black British women and their maternal empowerment.

According to Afua Hirsch, the question of identity is too important to ignore, to get wrong (she has, of course, much sense to speak on Brexit): it concerns "the relationship between … the individual and the group," and in this way cuts across every boundary and every question (21). The novel, *Girl, Woman, Other* is an attempt to depict in fictional form many of the feints, slights and nuances of identity about which Hirsch has written and campaigned less a novel than an inter-linked set of short stories. This novel has twelve chapters that focus each in turn on a single individual almost all black, migrants but all in dialogue with Britishness and closes out on a final chapter which brings them all together at the première of a black-authored play at the National Theatre.

The necessity to acknowledge the mother as a co-protagonist is a process that is complicated by the ambiguous relationship to mothers, the concept of how motherhood is constructed and the presence of the dichotomous extremes of love and hate that exist in individual and societal relationship to the mother. To deepen the understanding of the concept (m)other, Jacqueline Rose's Mothers: *An Essay on Love and Cruelty* will be discussed in the following paragraphs, "Behind each and every child there is a story of mothers to be told. But they rarely get a mention. For the most part, they are wiped out of the picture" (11). For Rose, the act of wiping out the mother's story has a pathology that is as old as the story of the West. Her book

follows the argument, “that motherhood is, in Western discourse, a place in our culture where we lodge, or rather bury, the reality of our own conflicts, of what it means to be fully human” (1). She argues that the concept of ‘mother’ is trapped between the imperative be good!” (82) and at the same time “is the ultimate scapegoat for our personal and political failings, for everything that is wrong with the world, which it becomes the task unrealizable of course of -mothers to repair” (1).

According to Rose, a mother has to personify the concept ‘good’ as well as possess the power to transform every other expression of humanity, also into something good. All that while her own grief is not “allowed to wander outside the frame of the requisite pathos” (14). This implies a society that strictly censors the emotional and physical range of motherhood, in spiteful resentment of Rose’s critical note that, “given voice, space and time, motherhood can, and should, be one of the central means through which a historical moment recon with itself” (17). It seems the fears connected to the possible revelation that is the story of the mother, could stem from the notion “that the male mind has always been haunted by the force of the idea of dependence on a woman for life itself’” (26). As the Western world is known for its patriarchic systems as well as its tendency to colonize, Rose suggests “that the male colonization of mother’s bodies starts inside the womb” (54).

The condemning notion that arises from these statements is strongly reminiscent of the colonial resentment of the other; the need for the (m)other to sustain the society and lay the foundation of a prosperous future is like the colonizers despised dependency on foreign land and labor to give birth to and nurse the wealth of its nation. In order to maintain this despised dependency (child/mother or colonizer/colonized) society incepts an unrealistic ideal of motherhood, that essentialists, de-historicizes and even de-humanizes mothers, since “ideals are one of

the surest ways of punishing others as well as oneself" (26). She states that the Western world creates "a culture that commands a mother to be all for her child" (109). Essentialism is taken to the extreme by wiping out everything else about the woman and allows her only to exist on the premise that "a mother is a mother and nothing else" (78). Hall terms this the "splitting between that which one is and that which is the other" (70), and although it is the only way to continue existing, Western society persecutes the concept of an unattainable ideal of motherhood as mothers are deemed guilty of ruining this love.

According to Grand and JillSalberg, the "much-needed expansion in our vision of the human family" (1). In psychoanalysis, the canon on trans-generational trauma "has been inspired by the increasing attention to the way massive trauma can shape the familial unconscious" (1). This expansion of vision makes the subject of one's own history suddenly into the co-star of a much bigger plot. By expanding the approach concerning personal trauma, the stories that could, and as claimed by Grand and Salberg, should be considered when facing oneself, lead the individual into a familial past that encompasses historical events as much as emotionally relevant times. "Children contain the unassimilated trauma of their parents, and often their grandparents and beyond", so the "phantom is a formation of the unconscious that is found there not because of the subject's own repression, but on account of a direct empathy with the unconscious or the rejected psychic matter of a parental object" (11).

Nicoleta Gheorghe describesthe term trans-generational trauma as a transfer- that takes place in the space between generations(263).Trauma that is transferred through the generations without being addressed as part "of a meaningful narrative so that affect is devoid of any psychological resonance" (263), has a lasting impact on

the notion of self. Its residue leaves intangible and unthinkable parts on the self – it becomes a phantom. (264). Gheorghe continues her thought as she claims “that what haunts us are not the dead but those gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (264). Being denied the knowledge of these phantoms origin and thus denied the possibility to cope with it can manifest itself in pain of any kind; it becomes like a phantom limb that transcends generations. According to Grand and Salberg, Conclusively, the psychoanalytical dialogue on trans-generational trauma aims for the “implicit knowing to move towards articulation” (1). For “a liberating narrative of our history” (2), one must be guided to identify, trace and empathize with the phantoms rooted in our very being.

Key to the process of uncovering the phantoms is the fact that the transfer of trauma is always connected to attachment, or the lack thereof. This attachment could be viewed as access to the emotional history and present of parents that gives the child the impression of being held. According to Freud C. Alford. “For holding is not something that begins and ends in infancy and childhood, it continues throughout life, as we try to find a place in which we are secure enough to just be” (13). Even if it means embracing the trauma as “a living link to the parent” (14), individuals chose this opportunity to “give substance to the past”for “without this access, everything feels phony, unreal, including the child him or herself” (13). The means to avoid “being dropped by the mind of the mother” (13) often encompass “role reversal a strategy undertaken by the children of traumatized or disturbed parents” (14). Strategies like these strongly influence the concept of self as well as acts of self-representation, as they lead to a distorted perception of the (power) relationship between parent and child, if it is not identified as a phantom.

While this transgression that reaches through the barrier between unconscious

and the conscious takes a lot of reciprocally effort and willingness, individuals rather tend to pass over the secrets and apparition that reside within the mother as well as in the daughter. When Sue Grand ponders this thought, she is reminded of Leary's remark that "passing always occurs in the context of a relationship: it requires, on the one side a subject who does not tell, and on the other, an audience who fails to ask" (41). It is therefore the mutual agreement of the self and the (m)other to ignore their shared narrative rather than bearing the burden that would come of knowing and acknowledging each other's full story. A movement like All Lives Matter is proof that this incomplete notion of self as well as the phantoms that reside within a familial story. It can lead to massive trauma on the one side and to massive denial on the other side. Incorporation of the concepts discussed would lead to the realization that one "cannot avoid being the alienated other in someone else's pre-history" (4), which would reduce self-importance in face of personal and societal realities. By acknowledging these practices and putting them in context of society at large as a "intersection of psyche and culture" (40), each individual would have to accept that their "'normative unconscious' was also infused with cultural prejudice, that repeated hegemonic practices, which disqualified" (47) their (m)others.

The theoretical findings and look closely into the construction of the self and the implications for self-representative acts in the characters of Amma and Yazz. By searching the apparition within these characters, the way in which Evaristo constructs the significant (m)other will shed light onto the importance of a co-narrated self-narrative. Amma introduces the reader to her story, switching in and out of the present and the past as her inner monologue carries her through the city. She is the director of the play *The Last Amazon of Dahomey* (Evaristo 1) which opens at 'The National' in London. On her way to the theatre, she inspirations "years ago she expected to be

evicted as soon as she dared walk through the [National's] doors" (Evaristo 3). It is interesting to note, that the theatre venue Evaristo decides to stage Amma's play is called 'The National Theatre'. Amma is convinced that years back she would not be allowed speak and act as herself on the stage where the nation is represented. The stage where Great Britain displays who she is, onto what she shines her spotlight, what frames the scene, who she displays as her people, whose voices are only perceived as background noises and who is silenced. Amma perceives that she would be a mute side character. She passes in the background and is blacked out and by that rendered invisible as soon as something of importance is happening center stage. Her attempt to enter this nation's story is making her an invader only grudgingly tolerated on the fringe and speaking up would make her an offender who has to be driven out. At the beginning of this novel, Evaristo introduces the reader to a main conflict within one of her co-protagonists. Amma is a woman in her fifties, who identifies as a female, black and lesbian and is the mother to the nineteen-year-old Yazz. She therefore experiences the process of mothering on the level of gender, race, her sexual orientation, and in her role as mother. As 'being black' already qualifies an individual for being mothered in Western societies, the additional identification with the categories 'women' and 'lesbian' further marginalizes Amma.

For Amma this meant that from childhood on that she would not only be pushed to the margins by the mainstream society but would further be silenced by the "strategic essentialism" (57) within the category 'black' that effectively muted her personal experience. Stuart Hall claims that a "singularly inclusive black identity also created many serious problems […as] it tended to silence all those who were subordinated within this category" (57 Identifying as a lesbian within this already marginalized group puts her even further "outside the normative category of

heterosexual masculinity", and as Amma perceives, would have led to her eviction from 'The National'. Amma sees herself as an activist, but her fight for the liberation of women is as much a public one as it is a very private one. Much of her reminiscence is shaped by the notion that she has to fight for the mere right to exist in her own way and "until the mainstream began to absorb what was once radical and she found herself hopeful of joining it [… she was] a renegade lobbing hand grenades at the establishment that excluded her" (2). As a black woman who was born in wake of Independence Declarations of many former colonies, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the feminist movements of the 60's and 70's. She still felt restricted, unwanted and excluded from and marginalized by the British national narrative throughout her life. Fighting for own equality and being able to express that fight publicly has been a family tradition, thus Amma especially holds self-determined life in high esteem.

Amma claims, "as for me, I get my fighting spirit from my dad Kwabena, who was a journalist campaigning for Independence in Ghana" (9). Her fight for independence does not aim for the liberation of women. She still acknowledges her father as the one introducing her to political activism. In her opinion, the establishment, and everyone that conforms to it, and by that confirms its' structure, can be identified as people who oppress and reject "her wonderful, artistic, highly individualistic and rebellious self" (16). As she is staging a play right in the middle of the establishment, one ought to wonder if she really rejects it, or if she rather wants to carve out a space for herself within the establishment. Her recollection of her father's ambitions echoes what Hall terms "the pursuit of 'roots' as a symbolic counterweight to the process of exclusion and marginalization" (Hall 56). He accentuates that "in this discussion of complex representation of matters of race, gender, sexuality, and

ethnicity, […] the time had come to take the necessary risk of abandoning the oversimplifications of the previous era" (56).

For Amma the search for 'roots' is to find out who she truly is and what she wants to stand for in her society. She has the "believe that a unique 'true' selfhood" (34) is somewhere rooted in her, thus her quest is an internal one, undergone by many people socialized in the Western world. But also, a public one, as her society constantly denies her this 'true selfhood' because a black female body is constructed in a reductionist way. In her earlier days she aspired to be an actress, a profession that allows her to assume various roles and discover a multitude of experiences. She felt "disillusioned at being put up for parts such as slave, servant, prostitute, nanny or crime and still not getting the job" (6). She experiences that the world of theatre only holds certain roles for her and she realizes when one director notes "with [her] African hips and thighs [she was] perfect slave girl material" (6), it is Amma's body not her ability that determines the spaces she is allowed to occupy. Giles and Middleton note that "the possibility of some human agency, choice and self-determination remains however constrained by social structures" (42). These externally enforced limitations to what her experiences might be and who she could be, become apparent through the roles she auditions for as much as in the society she lives in. And just as she walked right back out again(6) after the director's comment at that particular audition, Amma chose to walk out of the place she perceived was assigned to her by society.

By upholding her politics about her thoughts and body she assumed a position on the fringe, rebelling against and disrupting the story a nation talks about itself by insisting to speak up. Agency is the key to the development of a strong character, such as Amma constantly narrates to herself and to those around her. How Amma exorcises

this “sense of identity and control” (58) will be discussed in the following. Firstly, turning to the statements that, project a strong sense of self also by rooting herself in the allegiance with another person. Secondly, the observation of Amma’s perceived authenticity, her secret emotions and the resulting self-representational acts will lead towards a discussion on her constructs of her mother and herself as a mother. Amma’s ‘fighting spirit’ is most visible in her establishment of her co-owned theatre company.Bush Women Theatre Company best captured their intention, they would be a voice in the theatre where there was silence, black and Asian women’s stories would get out there. They would create theatre on their own terms; it became the company’s motto on Our Own Terms or Not at All.(14).

While she was “lobbing hand grenades at the establishment that excluded her” (2), she gained agency through her “renegade” (2) activities. Strength and fighting spirit become part of her self-narrative, a trait she shares with the companies’ co-founder, Dominique a “kindred spirit who would kick arise with her” (7). With this encounter the quest to find and be her ‘true self’ gains validation by another person and even though she “prefers running solo, and mixing with others who do not try to impose their will on anyone else” (18), she is able to root herself in this relationship, gaining socio-cultural relevance by being acknowledged by an ‘other’. It is further interesting to notice, that Evaristo made this personal matter of finding and expressing agency publicly a co-operation between Amma and Dominique. It is important for an individual to tell their own story, but at the same time Evaristo reminds the reader that even a personal story is shaped and partly co-narrated by others. This hints towards the thesis and underlines the theoretical discussions of previous parts in this paper.

The strength of a story, even a personal one, is determined by support of others who assist and co-operate in its narration. Amma’s desire to find her ‘true self’

forced her to battle with hegemonic structures, also in her family. She felt the un-proportional pressure to conform outwardly(73) which in turn implies that who she was inside was perceived as undesirable and unimportant. When she remembers the idealized scenes of shared family meals, “it was like we were literally being force-fed his politics” (12), the dominance of her father over her voice left her feeling like “his captive congregation” (12). According to Rose, to present this theme ‘shared family meals’ as a “patriarchal fantasy of the suburban” (127) by language that suggest captivity further underlines Amma’s need to fight for her freedom as well as it critiques the formerly discussed ideal within many mothers find themselves captive. So, founding ‘Bush Woman Theatre Company’ was the attempt to create a space of liberated stories, clearing the table of watered-down dishes suited to the Westernized palate that were served by an oppressive, omnipotent entity and getting a taste of how uniquely spicy, albeit sometimes hard to digest, or how soothing to the soul it can be, to partake in a shared meal if many are invited to contribute to the table. The tension between rejecting what rejected her first on the one hand, and the need to belong on the other hand, collide within the character of Amma.

According to Giles and Middleton, “the ways in which we act and experience ourselves are shaped by the social environment within which we exist and our relations with others” (40). As Amma experienced strong rejection, she herself turned towards a radical resentment of all she considered establishment. Earlier the question of her goal to destroy the establishment or craving a space within it was raised. If one looks at the shared family meal, it could be argued that she wants to uphold the ritual in itself but wants to assume a constituting role when performing it. Or even further, she wants to assume the freedom to enforce her ideals onto someone else, just as her family did with her. Amma believes in stating her opinion openly and being

expressive about her political and social beliefs, and is aware of what is considered 'normal' as she makes conscious decisions against conformity.

When she states, "I am a dyke" (12) and "learnt to head all women off, to state her intentions upfront, to never sleep with the same person twice, or pushing it thrice even if she wanted to" (21) she projects a strong sense of self-confidence and firm opinions that shape her actions. "Yazz knows full well that Amma will always be anything but normal [… and] recently described her style as 'a mad old woman looks, Mum' (3). This impression of self-confidence is amplified by her use of adjectives like "customary" (2) when describing her coffee, informs the reader that she "has her own sod-you style"or that her "pink lipstick [is] her perennial signature style statement" (3). As seen in the earlier discussions on notions of the self, Amma, too, often turns her gaze to those that surround her and uses them as references when negotiating towards her 'true self'.

These self-representative acts could be traced to Jenson's notions on bothering, and the power dynamic behind the process. It seems that each action she takes is like a power pose, inflated and intended to intimidate, to project authority, inwardly and outwardly, and over her mind and body. An authority, she feels, her mother relinquished when marrying her father. When Amma talks about her mother, it is with a sense of regret for which Helen could have been, and anger for not knowing and pursuing her dream and surrendering to the patriarchy. Amma fights against all those who are robbing her of her voice, but she never even considered her mother to have one, too. She accuses her father of shutting up her mother, but she too, only wants to govern over her. The few interactions that are re-narrated between her and her mother, Helen, are marked by accusations on Amma's side and shallow excuses made by her mother, whose motivations, policies and emotional state are not apparent

to the reader, as Amma seems to not have asked her about those matters.

This is further amplified through the notion that she says she got her “fighting spirit” (9) from her father the only fights worth acknowledging are public or political ones; the disregard of internal or domestic battles produces a silence from parties, the mother and the daughter. The fact that Amma encloses her mother in the domesticity of motherhood underlines the claim that she does not want to destroy the establishment but rather wants to establish it “On Our Own Terms” (14).

Every accusation of inauthenticity, of betraying her ideals, being a fraud or an impostor, echoes in between the empty and silent spaces of the missing narrative of herself and her mother, Helen. She says her mother “wasn’t the only half-caste in Aberdeen in the thirties and forties but she was rare enough to made to feel it” (9), stating a biographical fact but not acknowledging the hurt it must have caused her mother and how it might have impacted her. “Her silent acquiescence”, which made her father chose Helen for a wife, according to Amma, would at the same time make Helen “an apologist for the patriarchy and complicit in a system that suppresses all women” (10), as well as a stable other from which Amma can construct herself. The attempt of her mother to gain acknowledgement by arguing that “human beings are complex” (11) is immediately shut down by Amma with: “I tell her not to patronize me” (11). These statements are ostensibly about Amma’s father. Yet, even the hint of complexity claimed by her mother, the suggestion that she could be more than just a mother, that she was someone before becoming a mother, is seen as a threat that has to be subdued immediately.

As much as Amma sees herself as a renegade, an outcast and rebel, she essentialisms her mother to her maternal duties in accordance to Western society’s construction of that role and claims that “Mum’s unfulfilled now we’ve all left home

because she spends all her time either cleaning or redecorating it" (11). Besides the fact that she complies to the notion that a mother only exists for her children, Helen seems to have no narrative of her own, lest co-narrating Amma's story. "She has neverbeen complaining about her lot, or argued with him, a sure sign she's oppressed" (11), so Amma's youthful judgement.

According to Rose, the thought that her personal disregard of her mother as a woman, who struggled to present her family with the "patriarchal fantasy of the suburban" (127) never occurred to her. This made her complicit in this oppression, against which she now as a mother herself struggles, as she emotionally represses her construction of self and at the same time overcompensates through self-representational acts. "Mum never found herself", so Amma at Helen's funeral, and although she notes that "she could barely look at her father at the funeral" (35), it is yet again remarkable that even in death the mother is disregarded. As if her life and death paled in comparison to the importance of those who governed it. Amma is keen on finding her 'true self' and presenting herself as a woman full of emotions, political views, agency and sensuality all those things she thought and felt her mother had not. The emotional barrier Helen built as well as Amma's essential zed view of her mother resulted in Amma constructing a self that lacks fundamental truths as the silence became impenetrable through the death of Helen.

The choice of Amma to become a mother is another way in which this conflict of wanting to destroy the establishment and breaking in the wall to create a space of her own choosing within the society can be observed. "Yazz was the miracle she never thought she wanted, and having a child really did complete her, something she rarely confided because it somehow seemed anti-feminist" (36). While this note shows the evolutionary nature of the 'self' it also shows how cautiously aware Amma

is of the dangers imminent to essential zing a woman to the role of mother. Evaristo uses the adjective “never”, an absolute term that reflects the finality with which Amma constructed her mother. If this term could no longer be applied to a ‘truth’ she assumed about herself, the possibility for human complexity must also be applied to mothers. Rose says, that “feminism has long pointed out, by refusing to be mothers, women have the power to bring the world to its end” (48).

Evaristo illustrates Amma as a radical, black, lesbian feminist, and refusing to be a mother could have been the ultimate rejection of the establishment. She longs for independence and dreads the idea of being bound to another person’s desires and needs. As she feels this would resemble her mother’s voluntary incarceration too much; yet in motherhood she tethers herself to another person, to her society. By becoming a mother, even one who claims that her daughter would “be her countercultural experiment” (36), she supports the establishment nation by contributing to its continuing existence. She is aware of that, and it can be observed that her expressions of longing for her daughter of connectedness and worry are thoughts she tries to avoid, secrets she seldom and somehow ashamedly only admits to herself. Human connectedness is something of which the untold story of her mother cautions her, and while her construction of her mother explains her adversity to monogamous relationships “even if she wanted to” (21), becoming a mother means accepting a commitment loaded with internal conflict.

These self-representational acts that proclaim independence make the desired connectedness to her daughter a hard thing to express, as it conforms too much to the established role. As Amma does not want to be just a ‘mother’, knowing how her essential zed construction of Helen limited her voice and left in them both the phantom of unspoken love. Only to herself does she admit that she “misses her

daughter now she's away at university", that her home seems empty and "she misses the Yazz who stomps about the place" (39). From the moment Yazz was born, Amma inevitably constructs herself inwardly and outwardly as the 'mother of Yazz', all acts of self-representation, her whole narration is put into relation with the truth that "Yazz can stay forever / really". (40)

All Lives Matter becomes the real countercultural narrative, as Amma realizes that her life as a mother matter, and who she is impacts and shapes her daughter fundamentally. No life can be discarded easily, especially not the life of a mother, because without them we would be no more. In the introduction to the paper, the phrase 'I exist' was uttered, and every action Amma takes seems to join in with this chorus. In becoming a mother, she realizes that Helen, too, must have tried to tell her and their society that she existed and only now can Amma grasp that this mattered.

Yazz' need for substantiality, especially concerning roles within the family, seems to mirror Amma's rejection of them in an equal degree. In statements like "As for Dad (you can call me Roland, no, you're my dad, Dad)" (45) her need for her others to abide to the 'codes' becomes as much apparent as in her demand towards Amma "to shop in Marks & Spencer like normal mothers" (3). She has an image of "proper fatherhood" (45) and reckons "feminism is so herd-like […], even being a woman is passé these days" (39), which suggests that she resents how feminist' thought robbed her of her mother. The discussion on trans-generational trauma explained earlier that role reversal is a possible coping mechanism, if trauma stays unaddressed. Yazz perceives herself as "Mum's emotional caretaker, always has been, always will be" (50). Amma so strongly refused and suppressed taking part in the traditional and established construction of family to a point of denying herself a real connection "even if she wanted to" (21). It can be observed that Yazzdoes not only try

to re-establish fixed and essential zed roles of her others but is actually trying to fulfill what Amma wanted but denied herself being a caretaker. The novel does not incorporate a dialogue between Amma and Yazz on their views and emotions on attachment in relationships, Yazz actually refrains from asking and Amma just never tells. Just as "Yazz suspects they [Amma and her girlfriends] have gruesome threesomes, and can't bring herself to ask" (52), Amma, who indeed "[indulges] in a little ménage á trois / upon occasion / (Yazz would be horrified if she knew this)" (22) does not allow her feelings on love and attachment to be understood and incorporated into Yazz' self-narrative. And there is also the silence on the matter of neglecting the mother. Amma neglects her role as a mother based on her fear of becoming 'just a mother'.

While Yazz repeatedly notes that the mother's role was unsatisfyingly filled in her life when narrating to herself that Amma must have "[realized] she's not been the perfect picket-fence mum and is making amends" (55). So, on the one hand, it can be observed that Yazz wants to partake in her parents live on an emotional level, but the fear of what she might discover leads "her to keep him [Roland] in check" (Evaristo 48) and is even proud "she's almost got there with Mum" (48). Her notion of keeping her parents confined in roles whose boundaries she determines, give her the false impression of a "healthy relationship" (48), where she is in fact exercising power, as Jensen described, in offering and relegating "subject positions as others" (65) in her self-narrative. This strongly depends on the dehumanizing factor which Rose illuminated in her writing, taking away the historical reality of the mother and neglecting her capacity to have a full emotional range. One note that might illuminate this further is Yazz' impression of being "a daughter with X-ray vision / she can see through parental bullshit" (44). This confirms Hall's notion of being able to read

people like a code and literally strips the parents to the bone. While the X-ray does certainly show fractures, present or past, it does not show all the burns and bruises life has left on a person.

Yet even in the imagined conversation about the possible failure of the play she constructs Amma's breakdown "after forty years of hard graft blah di blah" (49) in a dismissive way. It is an active refusal to acknowledge the mother as an individual with emotional depth and reminds the reader of Helen's plea for the complexity of humans, including mothers. Just like Amma silenced her mother in this discussion, Yazz seems to gain a perverse sense of pleasure when stating that "helping me on to the property ladder will be the defining act of your life, Mumsy" (49) and Amma "didn't reply" (49). It seems like the ultimate revenge for the unjust separation between unborn child and mother, persecuting everything that is not 'good' about the mother and punishing her for the ruining the first and truest love. Amma wants to be a "person in her own rights" (257), a feat that is unrealistic, as Evaristo's novel uncovers by telling the stories of co-protagonists. *All Lives Matter* might be the name of a very questionable movement, but in face of the novel a fundamental truth with which Evaristo's characters shaped by the individualistic humanist' claim to the 'true self struggle.

The following paragraphs focus onto the familial story of the Rydendales. As the analysis unravels the individual tales of these women and weaves a new pattern out of the individual narratives' threats, connecting and attaching where trauma severed the bonds between mother and daughter. Itrestores the rough edges the silences have created over six generations. The aim is to identify the secret pains that shaped the co-protagonists by specifically highlighting incidents of rejection and opportunities of attachment that impacted the mother as well as the daughter. As

Evaristo's writing puts the reader in a position from which they can emphasize with the mothers as well as the daughters, it becomes possible to trace trauma through the generations without the persecutory lens often applied when regarding the self and one's (m)others.

By identifying these pains, secrets and silences that haunt these women, these paragraphs attempt to tell a unified story, the story of a family, the story of a nation. The 'rejected black female child' shall be the name of the phantom that resides "in the place between generations" (263) and by joining its place, outside 'The National', the paper acknowledges its existence as well as the relevance of its story. According to Grand and Salberg, further, the repeated rejection exemplified in the following debate sheds light onto "the way massive trauma can shape the familial unconscious" (1). As the black female child might one day become a mother, it is these papersattempt to make room for these (m)others' stories, for "motherhood can, and should, be one of the central means through which a historical moment recon with itself" (17). Penelope, a London based teacher in her late seventies with racist tendencies, introduces the reader to her narrative by taking them back to her sixteenth birthday when her parents "told her she was a lie" (280). By phrasing the realization that she was adopted in a way that implies absolute rejection of everything she thought to be, Evaristo manages to capture the severity this biographical fact has on the notion of self for the adolescent mind of Penelope.

Up to this point, she perceived her parents as emotionally cold and distant, a fact she ascribes to their personalities. The revelation of this 'lie' makes her wonder since "they didn't add, in that moment, […] that they loved her, something they'd never told her" (281), if there is something inherent to her that disqualifies her for being worthy of love. "She was an orphan / a bastard / unwanted / rejected" (Evaristo

282), all things an infant is neither guilty of nor responsible for. Yet she feels the rejection of the little girl she has once been with full force, unknowing that the pain she is feeling is a pain shared throughout the generations in her family. According to Nicoleta Gheorghe,as noted earlier, “that what haunts us are not the dead but those gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (264), the trans-generational trauma of the rejected black female child is an unknown phantom that repeatedly inflicts pain to the familial unconsciousness and bruises the individual consciousness.

At the end of the novel, after she took a DNA test aimed to reconnect her with possible living relatives, she states that “the test didn’t provide answers, it confronted her with questions” (447). Jacqueline Rose notes that mothers are held accountable for all that is unclear, wrong or bad in the life of a person, or even a nation. Penelope, too, wants answers; thought the revelation of her ancestry would provide it. A trans-generationally transferred trauma goes beyond the mother, looking for a “psychological resonance” (263) in the familial story, opening the path to an inquiry that goes beyond the question ‘who am I?’ towards the question ‘who are we?’ which is echoed in Penelope’s musing “of whose history was she? (282). Linking this to Alfords notion, it can be claimed that it is not only the accountability for certain events that would reconnect the daughter to the mother, but it is the access to the emotional history of the (m)others that would give substance to the ever present but ungraspable phantom (11). When the devastating news of being adopted hit Penelope, she longed for her parents to hold her, reassuring her of unconditional love. As the earlier debate showed being held close is not only a basic need in infancy but is a need that continues to be present throughout live. In this moment of need, when Penelope’s parents choose not to hold her close, the incident of rejection from her early childhood unconsciously repeats itself.

In order to trace this phantom through the generations, it is necessary to identify where the trauma first appeared. Penelope notes that “it’s easy to forget that England is made up of many Englands” (450), this nation has not one history, just as a person has more than one story inside, which underlines the thesis of the co-protagonist nature of self. This remark also connects back to the play staged at ‘The National’, whose premiere night is central to the novel. In search of herself, the questions make her feel “like she is going to the end of the earth, while simultaneously returning to her beginnings / she’s going back to where she began, inside her mother’s womb” (450), a reference to the DNA test which uncovered Penelope’s roots in seventeen nations or regions of this world. Grand and Salbergtermed this “the much-needed expansion in our vision of the human family” (1). By conceding space within the self-narrative through acknowledgement of the (m)others’ story, the empty spaces within the individual gain substance.

When Hattie is pregnant at fourteen and gives birth to her daughter, Barbara (Penelope), she looks to her mother in awe as she observes Grace meeting every need of her grandchild as well as her daughter’s. As “Ma told her she must treat the child as the most precious thing in the world and not be clumsy with her / we have to make sure she survives, Hattie / because we love her very much” (370), Hattie is unaware that her mother is encountering a traumatic time in her own life again from a healed but scarred standpoint. Hattie further notes that “she wasn’t sure she loved the baby, she wasn’t sure she knew what love was, it was a big word” (370), which might be a thought shared by many fourteen-year-olds, but considering her first years of being rejected by her mother.

This deliberation seems to be uttered by the phantom out of the unconscious space within the familial story into Hattie’s present. It is Joseph Rydendale, whose

concern for the social standing of his daughter, leads him to sever the bond that could have redeemed Grace and Hattie by holding Barbara together, as he reinforcing the trauma of the rejected black female child. Slowly and gradually their enthusiasm fades and vanishes which is highlighted by the novel as Evaristo analyzes:

> That day Pa came into the bedroom to see his grandchild for the first time sinceBarbara was born, Ma was getting herself washed in the bathroom / he said the baby had to go / Hattie said she wanted to keep her, just as he swiftly plucked her from her arms with his strong hands / before he left the room, he said, you don't speak a word about this, to anyone, ever, you must forget this ever happened, Hattie (370).

Society's ruling seems to have great influence on the matter of the black female child and the repeated rejection due to this ruling that can be observed in this family underlines this claim. Joseph justifies his forceful movement of Barbara, the theft of the opportunity to hold a black female child, to Hattie when he claims that "your life will be forever ruined with a bastard child / men will have two reasons not to marry you"(370). Added to society's repeated intrusion into this relationship is its power over the mothers to be complicit to this violation by keeping their silence.

The incidence of rejection therefore is not just the separation of the child from her mother enforced by society's executive power, the family. Further, it is the mother's compliance to, or impotence to stand against, society's rejection of the black female child that severs the bond with a traumatic impact. This is proven by the fact that although Hattie sees Grace's grieved, as she "came in red-eyed" (370), Grace does not invite Hattie into the repeated pain of yet another lost infant. What cannot be left out in regard to the thesis is the 'passing' that occurs here, for each time Grace does not tell, Hattie does not ask. The missing dialogue is what induces the secret pain

to dwell in the (m)others to come, it will be like a bruise whose original impact cannot be remembered but causes the present self- pain.

Opportunities of attachment are the moments when the unconscious phantom whose agonizing ache that longs for connection touches the reality between self and (m)other. This connection between the familial unconsciousness and the phantom in the characters is not reversing the original trauma, yet it addresses the need to be close by building a bridge at “the fault lines in who they were and who she was going to be in the world” (280). The following examples out of the Rydendales lives will show how the opportunities for attachment impact the characters and will lead the paper towards its concluding note of acknowledging wounds as old as our society. By embracing the (m)other as an emotionally diverse being whose lived experiences matter as they manifest in phantom acts of self-representation.

Evaristo intentionally points out that trans-generational trauma often resides within the unconscious phase of human existence, a phase which is unarticulated by the child due to its developmental state and by the self-censorship of the (m)other. Hattie’s self-narrative and her actions would be different if her mother’s story would not have been “wiped out of the picture” (11). For Penelope, too, “her daughter became a great support to her after the end of Marriage Number Two her best friend, as Penelope often reminded her” (301). It is true that in childhood this kind of caretaking by the daughter could be regarded as a role reversal, an effort of the child to stay connected to the mother at any cost. Yet, when the adult Sarah accepts her mother’s feelings, it effectively holds the rejected black female child that still resides within Penelope’s self.

To conclude, this paper has set out to represent how Evaristo has explored trans-generational trauma, self-identity, motherhood, gender issue, racism and

emphasizing the need for communication and understanding between generations to foster personal growth and self-discovery. Through the novel, the novelist presents the relationship between mothers and daughters, and how this relationship can be empowering and challenging. By applying the notion of trans-generational trauma, marginalization, intersectionality, empowerment, identity and motherhood, this paper adds the new analysis of the novel lacks a more through historical explication in the literature. By acknowledging the relevance of (m)others' history, the potential for a more complete sense of self can be accomplished. For all those who were blacked out or not even allowed onto the stage, novelist writing creates an emotional resonance to the always present search for self within our society.

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